

HISTORY OF HERMON CAMP COLE
BY
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Background:

The surname Cole is of baptismal origin meaning "Son of Nicholas." As far back as 1379, Yorkshire, England, records show a Johannes and Elias Cole. Cole is a common name in England, Wales, but less frequent in Ireland, today. All of the histories I have been able to obtain indicate they all originated in England and with the exception of some very early intermarriages with French people who arrived with William the Conqueror (1066) and on the women's side of these families, Coles are of exceptionally pure English descent. The first of those French intermarriages was to Gundred, daughter of William the Conqueror. Many early Cole ancestors served close to the ruling monarchs of England in different offices and through many years. The first Coles to come to the U. S. A. (in our direct line) arrived at Plymouth Colony in 1632. They were sons of Sir Robert Cole of London. I do not know the mother's maiden name. The brothers were Job, John, and Daniel. Their names appear in Plymouth Colony records as early as 1633. They came over with William Collier, a London merchant. They came as free men and set up their own business in the colony so evidently had funds when they arrived. Daniel Cole, the middle son and our ancestor was born 1615 in England making his age 17 when he arrived in America. Daniel married Ruth Chester, born 1628 in England and died 1694. They were probably married about 1643 but the exact wedding date is unknown to me. The first child was born July 15, 1644, when Ruth was only 16 years old and Daniel was 29. There were nine children of this marriage and almost all of the children were married to children of the original families who arrived on the Mayflower. We are descendants of William, the 8th child born at Plymouth in 1663. He later moved to Eastham, Massachusetts. On December 16, 1683 William was married to Hannah Snow, the granddaughter of Stephen Hopkins and Constance Dudley Hopkins. Hannah's parents were Nicholas and Constance Snow (all arrivals at Plymouth in 1620). William and Hannah (Snow) Cole's son, Elisha #1 married Anne. No record of her maiden name or exact wedding date have been found but records show a son born October 9, 1715 and others. So the probable marriage date would be 1713 or 1714. Their fourth child Elisha II is the one from which we descended. Elisha II was born in 1719 and died in 1791, living first at Harwich, Cape Cod but in 1746 moved to Fredericksburgh, Dutchess County, New York. He built a log house there near the present sight of Kent, on a stream, in 1748. He also built a grist mill. He probably was the first miller in the family, followed by many more. He joined the 7th regiment of Dutchess County Militia, under Col. Henry Ludenton, and fought with them in the Revolution. He was a Minute Man before going into service with the regiment. He, his brother-in-law and older sons all fought in the Revolution. December 13, 1739 he married Priscilla Smalley, who died very soon after. His second wife, Priscilla's sister, Hannah, and Priscilla were both daughters of Joseph and Priscilla (Young) Smalley of Eastham, Mass. There were 12 children of the second marriage and our ancestor was Nathan Cole, their third child.

Elisha Cole I was a Baptist Minister, popular and very well thought of in New England. I have seen an account of Anne (1st Mrs. Elisha Cole) in an old book on witchcraft that said she was almost burned at the stake. However, they finally decided, because her husband was a minister and so well thought of, they would just consider her "a bit touched in the head."

Her 'crime' was taking water to people in the stocks because she could not stand to see them suffering from thirst. Because only 'witches' would dare to help anyone in the stocks, she had to be either a 'witch' or a bit off in the head.' It is hard to believe such nonsense today but it was not more absurd than other reasons for which they burned people at the stake in those early days.

Nathan Cole II was born March 7, 1783 at Carmell, Dutchess County, New York. He first married Esther Northrup on December 24, 1803. She died at Ovid, New York, August 17, 1805. One child, Eli, was born of this marriage on August 1, 1805, but he died August 23, 1805, living less than a month.

October 11, 1807, Nathan married Sarah Scott at Ovid and they had six sons born there. Sarah Scott was born at Ridgefield, Conn. on November 16, 1790. The sons were: Abner Bangs, 1809, Burt Scott, 1811, Hermon Camp, May 9, 1813, Oliver C. 1815 James Monroe, 1817, James Madison, 1819. Nathan junior was born July 26, 1825, in St. Louis, Mo., after they came West.

Nathan came to St. Louis in 1820. He traveled cross country to the Ohio River bringing considerable merchandise and a helper with him. They transferred the goods to a large raft and came down to Cairo, Illinois. Nathan expected to take the goods down to New Orleans and sell it there. However, in going down the river past St. Louis, the town looked very thriving and interesting so he decided to tie the raft up at Cairo and leave it in charge of his "trusted" helper and go back to St. Louis to look it over. He decided that after selling the goods at New Orleans he would return to St. Louis and settle down there. But when he went back to Cairo, his helper had departed with the raft and no one had any idea where he had gone. As Nathan had much money invested in the goods and not very much in cash, this left him in quite a spot. He went back to St. Louis and just managed to set up a beef and pork packing business in East St. Louis but lived in St. Louis. This was in 1820. His wife and six sons followed him in 1821. They left Oldan Point, New York, with 12 other families, went across country and down rivers on rafts to Shawneetown, Illinois. From there by ox carts across the Illinois and down to St. Louis. It is hard to even imagine the hardship Sarah Scott Cole must have gone through traveling with six little boys through a wilderness with the oldest just 12 and the youngest less than 2 years old. Particularly when she was used to living with as much comfort and convenience as anyone had in the Eastern States at that time.

The beef and pork packing business Nathan had started at East St. Louis must have done fairly well just to support the family but the Eastern Coles were farmers and grist millers and he knew both businesses well so it was natural for him to move on to Chester, Illinois where he bought a saw mill on the river that had two stone attachments for grinding grain. This flour mill that he started in 1837, with his two four foot grinding stones, is now the H. C. Cole Milling Company. It is the oldest milling company in either middle or Southern Illinois and second oldest in the whole state. It is also the oldest one operated continually through all the years by the same family. Nathan died in Chester, June 8, 1840. Nathan's great grandsons are still running the mills with the second largest mill at Memphis, Tenn. During the time between 1840 and 1861, Nathan's brother, Abner, was associated with him at Chester but Abner died in 1861. Records of "Council of Appointment of New York State" show:

"1811, Seneca Co., Nathan Cole, 2nd Brigade Infantry, John Sayler, Adjutant, vice N. Cole, Promoted, 1816. Seneca Co. Nathan Cole, 2nd Brigade, Major and Inspector. 1821 Seneca Co. 38th Brigade, Anthony Schuyler, vice Cole removed." Evidently Nathan held office after he came to St. Louis and must have come west thinking he would go back to New York and resume peacetime service with the 38th Brigade. Nathan died at Chester, Ill. in 1840 but Sarah Scott Cole lived until 1876.

Hermon Camp Cole, 3rd son of Nathan, married Emily Cocks in New York City, June 22, 1844. She was born April 16, 1821. The children were Charles Briggs, born 1854, Zachary Taylor, 1847, Alice Emily, Feb. 21, 1850 (Alice later married William Eliot Smith of Alton, Sept. 24, 1873. See the chapter on William Eliot Smith for more about her and their two daughters.). Henry Clay was born May 13, 1852 and married Blanche Dalbee of Alton, April 24, 1878, but lived at Chester where he was president of the H. C. Cole Milling Co. for a great many years. In the early days milling, even on a small scale, was very dangerous due to heat and dust from grinding. Spontaneous combustion resulted, causing accidents and fires, hazards for workmen and heavy financial losses for the mill operators. Insurance rates went higher and higher every year. Henry C. Cole felt these insurance rates could be reduced a lot if he could get mill operators to go together and form their own mutual insurance company. He found all the millers from many states very glad to cooperate in this project. He set up the Millers Mutual Insurance Company, now with head offices in Alton, Illinois, but he never was interested in running the insurance company (his interest was in milling and grain.) The Millers Mutual Insurance Company now handles many kinds of insurance in addition to millers and operates in many states today. Also, later, advanced methods of flour milling made it much safer for the workers and not the hazardous business for the owners that it was in the early days. I visited the Cole families in Chester many times as I grew up and later. They were my aunts, uncles, cousins. I can still remember my uncles, Charles and Henry (Harry to the family) always being so strict with the men working in the mills to keep everything as safe as possible for the men. They were ordered never to try to save any equipment if anything went wrong but to get themselves out as fast as they could. They would not keep men in the mill who were ever careless about their own safety or the safety of others. They certainly were right too as their records (even of minor accidents) was the least casualties of any mill in the U. S. A.

Edward Everett Cole married Minnie Guthrie St. Vrain of Chester and moved to Fargo, N. D. He owned and operated two hotels there. Nathan, jr., moved to St. Louis where he opened an investment company and took great interest in developing St. Louis. He founded the Cole Bros., Grain business and the Nathan Cole Investment Co.; he was one of the founders of the St. Louis Stock Exchange. In 1888, he was elected Mayor of St. Louis and was a member of Congress from 1876 to 1878. He was president of the Merchants Exchange and a director of the Bank of Commerce for 43 years and a member of the Second Baptist Church, taking a very active part in it.

On June 30, 1851, he married Rebecca Lane Fagin of St. Louis and they reared a large family. He died in St. Louis on March 4, 1904. Cole Street in

downtown St. Louis bears his name. Eunice Elizabeth, born 1854, married George J. Kendall of Alton, Ill. He was an employee of the Illinois Glass Company for many years. I do not have the exact date of his death but after he died his widow and daughter, Alice, moved to Portland, Oregon. She died in 1950 at the age of 96. Following the death of Hermon Camp Cole's first wife, October 14, 1859, he was wed to Sarah Jane (Newell) Flanigan on February 13, 1862. Sarah was a widow and the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Isaac Dennison Newell (see Sarah Green). Sarah Jane Cole was born March 24, 1832, in Winfield, N. Y. (see separate record of Dr. Newell for her background). She was a widow and a teacher. Her first husband only lived about a year. Sarah Jane Newell Flanigan and Hermon Camp Cole were married at Carrollton, Illinois by her brother-in-law, Rev. Justin Buckley, D. D., Minister of the First Baptist Church there. At first they lived in Chester where their first three children were born: Cora Verena, Grace, and Hermon, jr., but moved to Alton in 1868 just after my father (Hermon Cole) was born. At that time the schools were not very good at Chester and they moved here to better schools for their young children. They bought the property just across College Ave., from what is now Southern Illinois University, and is also now part of the University grounds. The property ran from Seminary east on College Avenue to Evergreen Avenue down Evergreen to the end of that street and back to what is now Western Military Academy. On Seminary it went to the Marsh property, now owned by Henry McAdams. On the corner of Seminary and College there was a stone church which was the original Upper Alton Baptist Church (just across Seminary from where the church is now). The property had two homes on it. The first house was a very large brick house of four stories which they occupied. A second house which was large, too, still stands just opposite where Annix comes in to College Avenue. It is now used for class rooms but Dr. Newell and family lived there before the Coles came to Alton. After buying the property the Coles tore down the stone church and rebuilt it (at the rear of the original home) for a carriage house with stalls and quarters on the second floor for the men working on the place. This building still stands. The original Cole home burned down a good many years ago.

Hermon Camp Cole traveled back and forth to Chester to run the mills there. It must have been a very miserable trip on boats from Alton to Chester on the Mississippi River as he probably had to change boats in St. Louis to get a boat out from there to Chester. However, by the time the family moved to Alton, Charles and Henry Cole just about ran the Chester Mills so actually Hermon Camp Cole went more in a supervisory capacity. He did not need to spend a great deal of time there. He turned his attention to cultural projects here in Alton. He was very active in improving Shurtleff College and gave it large donations of money. Also he was a very active member of the Upper Alton Baptist Church and encouraged any musical societies or anything that helped improve the town as a whole.

After they moved to Alton there were two more children born: Nathan and Newell who were twins born May 27, 1874. Cora and Grace Cole attended Monticello Seminary, Vassar and both were graduated from Shurtleff College. Hermon, Newell and Nathan attended Wyman Institute (later Western Military Academy) and Shurtleff College. Cora and Newell Cole both died unmarried.

Cora in 1892 and Newell 1896. Hermon Camp Cole died at Alton, Oct. 20, 1874. They are all buried in Upper Alton Cemetary.

Nathan moved to Springfield and set up his own investment company there. He married Estelle Lawrence, daughter of a prominent Logan County and Springfield family. Their two daughters, Margaret Cole (Blankmeyer) and Sara Jane Cole (Blunk) are both married and have children. Grace Cole married Dr. James G. Kiernan. They had no children. Dr. Kiernan specialized in mental diseases and was head of Anna State Mental Hospital for some years. He shocked other doctors over Illinois by refusing to permit patients tied up to control them and permitted safe mental patients to walk or play on the grounds. The results of this kind of treatment were so good that his ideas were soon used in all the State Hospitals and are now used everywhere. After resigning from Anna State Hospital he had an extensive private practice in Chicago where he resided until his death. Some years later in 1952, his widow, Grace Cole Kiernan, moved to Springfield, Illinois. She died there in 1957. She was the first president of the Upper Alton Women's Club and very active in organizing it. As a young woman she traveled extensively abroad; also in this country. She was very interested in musical dirckles. Hermon Cole was born in 1868 at Chester, Illinois and lived his early life in Alton. He married Lillian Gillham, daughter of Senator Daniel Brown Gillham, at the Gillham home on Leverett Avenue at the corner of Leverett and Worden Avenues, May 22, 1889. They first lived in Lincoln Nebr. for just about a year and then moved back to Alton and occupied a house Senator Gillham had built on Leverett at the other end of their property as he planned to leave the large home place to Lillian and for Mrs. Gillham to occupy the "small" house (ten rooms) if he died before she did. She did not want the large home place. In 1891 he was shot by burglars and died Easter Sunday, about ten days later. The changes of houses was made soon after his death and Hermon and Lillian Cole took over the original Gillham home. Hermon Cole opened a hardware business on 3rd Street at the end of Belle Street. It was on the river side just opposite the First National Bank and Trust Company. This business, Hermon Cole Hardware Co. was operated for many years. Main selling was to builders but also included fine guns, cutlery and household needs and appliances. The Bell Telephone Co. rented the basement, or rather part of it, for storage of their equipment and in 1912, in the worst possible January weather, a fire broke out in this equipment and in the middle of the night. Water mains were frozen up so the fire departments were almost at a standstill and helpless to control the flames. The whole building was destroyed and insurance companies paid for complete loss, both to the Telephone Company and Hardware Company. Hermon Cole had not been very well even before the fire so he decided not to go back into the hardware business. He had other interests so he just took care of them for a few years. Hermon Cole was a very active member of the Franklin Masonic Lodge, a Night Templar, and greatly interested in Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children in St. Louis. He collected funds for them through many years. Both he and Mrs. Cole were very active in their church work and members of the Upper Alton Baptist Church. She helped set up the Eastern Star Chapter here and was worthy Matron of it. Both took great interest in Shurtleff College and both belonged to civic organizations and many things toward beautifying and cultural improvement of Alton.

Their children were Hermon Harrison Cole and Cora Cole Fish: Hermon graduated at Alton High School, went from there to University of Michigan where he graduated both in liberal arts and their school of medicine (specializing in chest diseases). He interned at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis and later went to Sorbonne University in Paris, France. The war in Europe had broken out and caused many hundreds of cases of gassed lungs in the soldiers. Very little was known in this country (or any other) about gassed lungs and their treatment. The University of Sorbonne gathered all possible information and set up a special war course for graduated doctors and specialists in chest surgery treatment. Dr. Cole took that course in France. When the U. S. declared war he immediately joined up and was ordered to Camp Meade, Md. in less than two days. There he was head of the Medical Staff. He was transferred to Vichy, France where a large French and American Hospital center was set up. Vichy was ideal for the hospital center, being a world famous health resort long before the war. The French and American governments took over the hospitals and huge hotels already there and ill or injured soldiers were sent there directly from the front. Dr. Cole was at the head of the medical service for Base # 15. Later he was transferred to Valdehon and was head of the hospital staff there. When the allies took over Germany he was at the head of a hospital in Berlin. He remained in Berlin for over a year after the Armistice as the hospital was still full of Allied soldiers and he was not willing to turn them over to the Germans for care. He requested to be allowed to keep the American hospital open until these patients could be returned to France. He asked his staff of volunteers (none failed to volunteer even though all were eligible to return to the U. S.). Patients and staff were reduced and released as rapidly as possible.

Dr. Cole married Katherine Stadden, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. George Stadden of Springfield, Illinois. Her father was president of the Franklin Life Insurance Co. and one of the "Dollar-a-Year" men in charge of the American Red Cross in Washington, D. C. They were married ahead of schedule in 1917 and the wedding date was set in such a hurry prior to Hermon's induction at Camp Meade that the icing on the wedding cake had not had time to dry! After the war they settled in Springfield, Illinois, had four children of their own and reared five nephews and nieces of Mrs. Cole's who were left orphans. All the children are living today and have spouses and children of their own. Dr. Cole practiced medicine in Springfield prior to his death in 1952. Hermon's widow died seven years later on a vacation trip to Martha's Vineyard.

Cora Cole Fish lived in Springfield from 1914 to 1922. She was married to Raymond James Lawrence Fish of Bebington, Cheshire, England in July, 1922. She resided in England until 1929.

In 1914 the Hermon Cole (senior) family moved from Alton to Springfield, Illinois. Hermon Cole, Sr. joined his brother, Nathan in the investment business for a short time but Hermon's health made retirement necessary. They lived there until 1932. Then they moved back to Alton. Mrs. Gillham had built another home between the two original Gillham houses but she lived with the Coles as she was blind and an invalid for the last 6 years of her life. They moved back to Alton and occupied the residence at 3123

Leverett Avenue. After the death of Mrs. Gillham, Hermon and Lillian Cole bought the house from the other heirs. Their daughter, Mrs. Fish, owns and lives there now together with her daughter, Mrs. Grace Fish Hamilton and small son, Darden Cole Hamilton.

Cora Lillian Cole, only daughter of Mrs. & Mrs. Hermon Cole, Sr. was educated in the Alton Public Schools and by local private tutors. She attended National Park Seminary in Washington, D. C. and Sweet Briar College at Sweet Briar, VA. She was graduated from Shurtleff College in the School of Music. During the first world war she was chairman she was chairman of the Women's Division of the Second Liberty Loan Drive for Sangamon County. Later she joined the Y. M. C. A. canteen service and served in France. She married Raymond J. L. Fish in 1922 and resided in Bebington, England until her divorce in 1929. Cora Fish returned to Springfield, Ill. with her infant daughter, Grace Osborne Fish. Mrs. Fish was on the staff of the Illinois State Journal for several years prior to opening a children's wear store of her own in Miami Beach, Fla. She was called back to Alton by the failing health of her parents. Her father, Hermon Cole, died in 1939 followed by his wife Lillian in 1940.

For further information regarding the Sarah Jane (Newell) Cole family of Alton, see the article on Rev. Isaac Dennison Newell, D. D.

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